

COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT

In the fall of 1995, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) held a conference to stimulate dialogue about future developments in the fields of education, statistical methodology, and technology, as well as to explore the implications of such developments for the nation's education statistics program. This "Futures Conference" was unique for NCES because it attempted to combine considerations in all of these fields in order to stimulate the cross-fertilization and generation of ideas that might not emerge when discussing the topics separately. At this conference, the authors presented commissioned papers on targeted issues that were expected to be important over the next few years, and the discussants provided their comments.

From several perspectives, I believe the conference was highly successful. First, staff from NCES actively participated in all of the deliberations. As a result, they became personally engaged in the process of considering alternative futures for their agency. Since the "corporate culture" of this agency is to solicit and build on staff creativity, their participation and interest in this conference was vital. Second, both the formal and informal discussions generated many new ideas. The conference, as such, accomplished far more than the collection of commissioned papers alone could have because of the active interplay of ideas. Finally, many stakeholders in NCES's future saw this conference as a clear signal of the agency's commitment to continued improvement of the usefulness and quality of our surveys and data products. The stakeholders' positive response to the meeting was further reinforced by their expressions of interest in continuing to help in important ways. The success of the conference lies not in the sum of the individual presentations, rather in an overall perspective that provides guidance toward the future.

This document and its companion publication, *Conference Proceedings*, will serve as a concrete reference to ensure that the stimulating ideas exchanged at the Futures Conference are not forgotten. While the quality of the discussion at the meeting was exceptional, one cannot expect to absorb everything said during a two-day conference. Thus, it is important to have a record that the participants can refer to this year, next year, or five years from now. Moreover, this publication will provide a way to share those ideas with others who could not participate in the conference. For instance, NCES has many customers and

other stakeholders who have expressed keen interest in the conference proceedings and whose advice and considerations are welcome as a means to sustain the dialogue about NCES's future.

It is clear that if NCES wants to continue as a key player in providing information for education policy and decision making to the American public, policymakers, education researchers, and educators nationwide, it must continually reevaluate its program and products. In the future, we expect that NCES will receive requests for more of the kinds of products and services that it already provides. Also, we expect demands for new perspectives—on covering new topical areas, implementing new technologies, and adopting new methodologies. Already, major recent changes in the field of education are shaping our future program—for example, widespread innovations to achieve education reform, efforts to adopt both curriculum and performance standards, and examination of education in the United States within an international context. Not only are methodological advances creating opportunities to produce statistics in ways that may be more efficient and effective, but also technological developments are changing the world in which we create data and disseminate our products more rapidly than ever before. The Futures Conference and this publication provide a new vision for NCES—a vision that acknowledges the constraints on the resources of governmental agencies at the end of the 20th century, as well as clearly emphasizes the opportunities that can be achieved with innovative methodologies and technologies and through close attention to the priorities for statistical knowledge in the field of education.

This contribution to envisioning NCES's future is occurring at a pivotal time of transition. The Futures Project was conceptualized under the leadership of the first Commissioner of Education Statistics, Emerson J. Elliott and carried through under the stewardship of Jeanne E. Griffith as Acting Commissioner. I plan to use this publication in the upcoming years as a source of ideas for planning and thinking and as a foundation for long-term change in the organization.

Pascal D. Forgione, Jr.
Commissioner

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